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ABSTRACT

Because teacher expectations and student learning styles may conflict in a multicultural class, teachers should examine ways to meet the needs of multicultural students. In Western educational institutions, instruction is planned for incremental learning, students are expected to complete their assignments on time, and the classroom is object-oriented, using educational tools such as learning stations, tape recorders, and computers. Students from various other cultural and ethnic groups may have different learning and communication styles, including analytic and relational styles. There are three types of goal structures which are important to be aware of in multicultural classes: (1) cooperative or positive interdependence, when students work together to complete assignments; (2) competitive or negative interdependence, when students achieve their goals at the expense of others; and (3) individualistic or no interdependence, when student achievement of goals is not dependent on another students' goals. In order to match learning styles, goals, and goal structure, teachers need to identify particular styles of learning by following appropriate guidelines and communication strategies, which include: recognizing individual and cultural differences; planning instruction that provides for pluralism; utilizing situational role plays; and creating learning activity packages that meet similar objectives, but permit students to work independently or cooperatively. (Thirteen references are appended.) (MM)

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR THE MULTICULTURAL CLASS

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR THE MULTICULTURAL CLASS

Document: ISU Code of Student Conduct

Statement: Academic dishonest including plagiarism, cheating, submitting another persons' material as one's own, or doing work for which another person will receive academic credit. This means that a student is expected to do his own work.

Scene: An introductory course in Communication.

Participants: Three Nigerian students.

Offense: The students submitted identical written experiential assignments. From the view of the Western teacher, this was a flagrant case of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

Problem: A conflict between teacher expectations and student learning style.

This situation occurred in my class during the Summer of 1986. When I asked which student wrote the paper and suggested the other two had committed an unacceptable act, the students displayed confusion. The students defended their actions by stating that they wanted to do well.

Since their elder friend used language better and knew more, he prepared the assignment. From their view of learning, this was appropriate behavior. This scenario has probably been played many times in our multicultural classes. It is representative of the problems that can arise when there is a conflict between teaching and learning styles.

The purpose of this paper is to address the question: How can the teacher best meet the needs of multicultural-cultural students. First, I shall examine learning styles of teachers and students. Second, I shall

identify communication strategies appropriate for the multicultural class whether it be teaching English as a second language, or some other content area.

LEARNING STYLES: Teachers

In order to understand the learning styles of multicultural students, it seems appropriate to examine the ways a teacher's culture impacts on the way the teacher structures the classroom. We have been trained in Western educational institutions. Our teacher training institutions have taught us to view learning from a Western perspective. We have learned to write behavioral objectives, and to plan for incremental learning progressing step by step; we expect our students to get their assignments done on time, our time. We value interaction and carefully plan for teacher to students, teacher to student and student to student interaction. When we design learning strategies, we feel our students will learn more easily if they have an opportunity to choose from several similar assignments. Our instruction and classroom is object oriented. We create such educational tools as learning stations, learning packages, listening activities involving tape cassettes, and value hands on experiences. We value computers and a variety of software packages even for elementary students. Books and the chalkboard are no longer sufficient for the twentieth century classroom. Our Western culture tells us this is the way the effective teacher should teach. Furthermore, these techniques reflect our attitudes toward how students should learn.

In spite of our variety of teaching strategies and our teacher creativity, students in our multicultural classes do not always succeed and

frequently do not reach their potential. Teacher training institutions have attempted to solve the problem of multicultural students not learning, by requiring still another course for the education major. Educators have reasoned that if we were more aware of the culture of these students, then we could be more effective as teachers. At Indiana State University, the School of Education has mandated that all future teachers must complete a General Education course in multicultural education. Appropriate courses include those that are cultural specific such as Afro American Studies, and culture general courses including History, Political Science, Sociology, Educational Psychology, and Communication.

The previously mentioned courses probably provide the future teacher with information about a culture's art, history, social relationships, social organizations, and value systems. However, merely studying some other culture does not guarantee that a teacher will be effective in teaching students from that culture. In order to be effective and to increase classroom learning, the teacher needs to ask and answer several questions: How will the students in my class view the classroom? What does their culture teach them about learning? What is their culture's learning style? In what ways does their culture's view differ from my culture? The future teachers in my classes are not applying what they have learned about a culture to their classroom behaviors. In my opinion, the teachers multicultural education courses will improve teaching effectiveness only when such questions are answered.

LEARNING STYLES: Students

None of us are sufficiently skilled that we could identify and describe the learning styles of all cultures, but we can be expected to identify the

cultural and ethnic groups in our own classes. Gay (1978) identified a number of culturally determined communication variable that make up ethnic communication styles and determine the interaction of group members. These variables include attitudes, social organization, patterns of thought, roles, language, use and organization of space, time, nonverbal behaviors, etc.

The Anglo and Jewish-American students are representative of the analytic style. Their language is an elaborate syntactic code. They learn by focusing on a stimulus, and sustaining attention for long periods of time. They look for details and learning is viewed as impersonal. The Western teacher whether Anglo or Jewish-American has also learned in this way so he/she plans instruction from this perspective. An examination of texts for the English as a second language class reveal many are based on the analytical style.

The students in our multicultural classes who are not succeeding are often representative of a style other than the analytical style. These students come from cultural groups that teach viva relational style. Students in our classes prone to using the relational style include Mexicans, Asians, Hispanics, black Americans and the native American Indian. Characteristics of the relational style learner include the following. Their language may have a restricted syntactic code. They learn by looking for global characteristics and meaning is determined by the situation. Learning is viewed from a personal view and self orientation. The relational learner is feeling and people oriented. The black American may be more proficient in nonverbal than the white American user of the analytical style. The black and Hispanic children may experience conflict as a result of the direct eye contact demanded by the Anglo teacher and the indirect eye contact taught at home.

Hispanic students are highly motivated by the social reinforcement of the classroom. A type of reinforcement the Anglo teacher may not provide or allow fellow class members provide.

Goal Structures

Johnson and Johnson (1975, 1978) have conducted research dealing with classroom climate and communication strategies that facilitate learning. They have identified three types of goal structures which are important to the teacher who recognizes that students have different learning styles.

1. Cooperative or Positive Interdependence. Students work together to complete assignments and accomplish mutual goals. Examples of this structure include: students in a Public Relations class who plan, organize and mount a campaign for a brand of jeans or the United Way; children who study and build eighteenth century log houses.
2. Competitive or Negative Interdependence. Students achieve their goals at the expense of others. Examples of this structure include: the student who works his math assignment fastest, and the winner of a spelling contest.
3. Individualistic or No Interdependence. Student achievement of goals is not dependent on other's goals. Examples of this structure include: comparable tasks individually selected and demonstrated, writing an essay or speech based on publicly stated criteria, and analyzing a piece of literature.

Johnson and Johnson (1975) believe the ideal classroom should emphasize the cooperative goal structure. However, the teacher should be flexible

enough to incorporate the goal structure that most facilitates the desired goal. In the multicultural class, the teacher must match the student's learning style, the desired goal and the appropriate goal structure.

In order to appropriately match learning style, goals and goal structure, the teacher needs to be able to identify particular styles of learning. The experienced teacher may intuitively create teaching-learning strategies that facilitate learning. Other teachers may want to review the research on assessment of learning styles. Assessment instruments may be multidimensional, or measure cognitive, effective, and perceptual modalities. Bennett (1986) discussed the limitations of some of these instruments, and provides the reader with a list of available instruments.

GUIDELINES and STRATEGIES

We have considered the learning style of teachers and students and goal structures. The following guidelines and communication strategies are suggested as a means of matching learning styles and goal structures.

1. Recognize individual and cultural differences. If you "treat everyone alike", you are ignoring the uniqueness of the individual. If you "treat everyone different", you are ignoring the commanlties of all humans.
2. Remember your culture determines your view of learning and teaching. Your students may not share this view.
3. Plan instruction that provides for pluralism in the class. As teachers of multicultural students, it is important we continually remind ourselves that there are many ways to learn.

4. Build a warm, supportive, classroom climate. The teacher's communication behavior and the kind of student behaviors allowed in the class are the primary factors. (Hesler, 1983) Appropriate behaviors include: criticizing a behavior not the student, "your homework is late" is preferred to "can't you ever learn to get an assignment done on time." Other positive behaviors include allowing students to express feelings, and using student's ideas and opinions.
5. Create learning activity packages (LAPS) that meet similar objectives, but permit students to work independently or cooperatively and from an analytical or relational orientation, e.g., causes of the industrial revolution, products of various states or countries. This is not an easy task, but a worthwhile task, if it increases student learning.
6. Create learning contracts for motivated students. This strategy provides for an alternative way of learning. A learning contract can utilize the students own resources such as family members, traditions, and possessions. The learning contract specifies what should be learned and suggests various ways of acquiring the information, i.e. the parts of a speech.
7. Utilize situational role plays. Investigators are not in agreement on this strategy. However, the experienced teacher can create situational role plays which serve as a stimulus for discussion, understanding or acquiring information without alienating students. Superficial roleplaying another's culture can reinforce cultural

stereotypes. This strategy should be utilized only when the teacher and students are aware of their cultural stereotypes. When appropriately designed, role plays can aid students in understanding differences in meaning abstracted from those interactions. Obviously, the purpose of the strategy is to facilitate learning and not to make judgments of goodness or badness. This strategy involves the student, but no one should be required to participate. Some learn by observing.

In conclusion, we have considered teacher and student learning styles, identified three classroom goals structures, and suggested communication strategies that may be appropriate for the multicultural class. As Western trained teachers, we tend to believe that the more students interact with those who are culturally different the more skilled they become in interacting with others different from themselves. Let us make that thought reality by becoming effective in the classroom. Don't be guilty of accusing a student of plagiarism, simply because you don't understand their learning style.

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